"ALTHOUGH WE STILL HAVE A LONG WAY TO GO, I DON'T THINK WE WILL EVER STOP."A GRASSROOTS EFL TEACHER DEVELOPMENT GROUP IN SOUTH KOREA

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INTRODUCTION

Founded by eight secondary English teachers in Seoul in the summer of 1988, the Korean English Teachers' Group (KETG)[1] started as a professional book discussion group. Its first 'office' was a small coffee table in the living room of a female teacher's home. The teachers gathered over the weekend and discussed professional books or sets of articles mainly focused on educational philosophy and sociology. Not only did this small group of teachers discuss overt ideological orientations transmitted through the textbook (e.g. the hegemonic power of Anglo-centric culture and language that reinforces the cultural and social status quo), but also they were proactive regarding sociopolitical issues, such as the democratic movement in South Korea at that time. All the teachers in the group were teachers' labor union activists and advocates for social change who strongly believed in exerting teachers' collective power in the process of the democratization of Korea as well as educational policy making. As a result, KETG faced a difficult time when the South Korean government suppressed the teachers' movement for creating a teacher's union in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. During the turbulent social educational movement, over 1,500, some of whom were KETG members, were fired and dozens of them even went to jail. With the legalization of the *Chonkyojo* (National Labor Union of Teachers)[2] in July 1999, however, KETG has emerged as a national grassroots professional organization of Korean English teachers. Its membership

[1] Its Korean name is *Cheongook Yong-o Gyosa Moim* (National English Teachers' Group).
[2] The stated purpose for the *Chonkyojo* was to carry out *Cham Kyoyuk* (literally meaning 'true education'), which refers to education that aims to improve a young person's character as well as his or her intellect and in turn empower him or her. Although the two teacher unions (*Chunkyojo* and *Hankyojo*) have the right to bargain collectively with the Ministry of Education on wages or working condition—but not school curriculum—it is illegal for the unions to enter into collective action such as a strike. As of March 2001, about half of the KETG members were the *Chonkyojo* members.

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is mainly secondary school English teachers, but also includes elementary English teachers, university professors, graduate students, and prospective English teachers. The steering committee consists of five teams: Editing, Internet, Teacher Development, Advertisement, and Membership.[3] The KETG office, where teachers have weekly steering committee meetings and hold seminars for newly formed teacher study groups, is currently located in a commercial building in the northern part of Seoul.

KETG is an exemplary case of a grassroots professional movement of teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This "bottom-up professional development" (Bascia, 1999, p. 7) organization currently provides support and assistance to secondary and elementary school EFL teachers nationwide. As opposed to other professional organizations of Korean English teachers that were predominantly initiated and maintained by the top-down forces (e.g., the Ministry of Education, district administrators, school administrators), KETG is intended to directly serve the practical, intellectual, and sociopolitical needs and interests of EFL educators in South Korea. In particular, it strives to raise critical awareness among students, parents, and teachers with regard to the role of English in Korean society and in the world. Their position can be found in their mission statement on the website[4] in which it questions the ideological manifestations of learning and teaching English in the Korea EFL context, while pointing out the ubiquitousness of English use in Korea and resisting linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992) by raising questions like the following: What is English? Why do we, as Koreans, need to learn and teach English? What variety of English should be taught? What approaches to teaching EFL can best serve Korean secondary students in the standardized test-driven educational environment? What constitutes the roles and responsibilities of English teachers in Korea? How should we assess students' English proficiency, and for what purposes?

Taken together, KETG exemplifies critical efforts by periphery EFL teachers in an Asian country who strive to problematize and appropriate English teaching according to

[3] Eight teachers, who are all practitioners in secondary schools in Seoul, form the steering committee, along with a full-time administrative assistant.

[4] Their web page (www.english.njoyschool.net), which is written in Korean, is under an educational portal website called '*Jeulgeowoon Hakkyo* (Joyful School). As of May 2003, online membership was estimated at approximately 10,100. The website is an important way of disseminating a growing amount of information on EFL teaching practices and policies. It contains a variety of pedagogical information for teachers as well as students and parents.

their goals, needs, beliefs, values, and aspirations (Canagarajah, 1999). This view of the language teacher foregrounds the importance of sociopolitical engagement and stresses the role of teachers as 'transformative intellectuals' (Giroux, 1998), not merely technicians that transmit 'neutral' knowledge and skills to students. KETG additionally models grassroots teacher development efforts.

Recent years have seen an increased interest in teacher-initiated and teacher-led groups (e.g., Cramer, Hurst, & Wilson, 1996; Fishbaugh & Hecimovic, 1994; Holbein & Jackson, 1999; Meyer & Larson, 1998; Rogers & Babinski, 2002). Despite the proliferation of discussion regarding teacher development (TD) groups, few authors have examined how such TD groups are formed, what they focus on, and how they are sustained. Moreover, while a limited amount of empirical research on TD groups has been conducted, this topic has primarily been examined in North American school contexts (e.g., Birchak, Connor, Crawford, Kahn, Kaser, Turner, & Short, 1998; Clair, 1998). Relatively little attention has been paid, either theoretically or empirically, to TD groups in other social and cultural contexts. Also, there has been a significant lack of attention to sociopolitical issues involving the development of TD groups. In order to bridge this gap, it is necessary to illuminate the sociopolitical as well as pedagogical nature of a TD group in a non-Western country context, such as in South Korea. This paper describes an interpretive qualitative investigation of the potential and problems of the current KETG as a grassroots TD group, set within the sociopolitical reality of the promotion of global English and Western cultural values (Canagarajah, 1999; Pennycook, 1994; 2001).

BACKGROUND

The idea for this study was drawn from my own experience and professional growth that resulted from my contact with KETG. During my four and a half years of teaching at the secondary level in Seoul as a full-time, public school EFL teacher, I benefited from KETG's supplementary materials, books, and newsletters and the practical, yet critically informed teaching strategies these materials provided for me. I struggled to develop supplementary materials that could raise critical awareness regarding the role of English

as a "valued linguistic currency" (cf. Nino-Murcia, 2003) and as a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991) in the world and could refute the essentialzed (i.e., Anglo-centric, Americanized) notion of the English language and culture from the beginning of my teaching career.[5] I came across KETG published materials and found them instrumental in developing pedagogical ideas to make my classroom a more exciting, reflective, and critical learning environment for my students.[6] Not only was I grateful for their products, but I also wanted to investigate what factors were involved in keeping this TD group growing despite the many obvious challenges encountered by teachers in Korean secondary classrooms.

Like most teachers in other parts of the world, teachers in South Korea have a demanding, high-stress work situation, and do not have favorable working conditions and opportunities for personal and professional growth. They usually work under circumstances with minimal autonomy, have little influence over strategic decisions including evaluation of student performance, have few opportunities for collaboration with colleagues, and have minimal positive incentives, such as promotion or financial benefits.[7] The pressure to produce students who are high English-achievers is one of the most burdensome of these conditions. Secondary school EFL teachers in South Korea are expected to have a high level of expertise and skills as a result of the recent government policy emphasizing the importance of English teaching (see Yoo, this volume, for the government language policy). Since the late 1980s, the South Korean government has placed English learning and teaching high on its agenda so as to ensure that South Korea will play an active and important role in the world's political and economic activities (Li, 1998). The criticism from the government, the media, and parents has specifically focused on the lack of proficiency of Korea EFL teachers in spite of the social, cultural,

[5] The need for developing supplementary materials on my own stemmed from the lack of critical perspectives in the textbook that I was given to use in the school at that time.

[6] KETG publishes a wide array of practical materials including newsletters, handbooks, audiotapes, and CD-ROMs. These offerings have a steady stream of subscribers with membership. In-house documents from the KETG indicate that over 3,000 secondary school English teachers across the nation subscribe to their publications as of May 2003.

[7] Korean secondary teachers are required to teach 16-24 class periods of 45 or 50 minutes per week. With regard to class size, educational statistics provided by the Ministry of Education in South Korea (2000) indicate that the average number of students per class is 35.4 in middle schools, 38.9 in high schools and 47.2 in vocational high schools. In addition to teaching, teachers must do administrative work including filing reports, conducting surveys, counseling students and parents, leading extracurricular activities, monitoring halls, and so forth.

and institutional constraints (e.g., large class size, inappropriate teacher preparation, the reading comprehension-based college entrance examination, see Li 1998, for detailed discussion) faced by the teachers. Consequently, the pressures and burdens on South Korean EFL teachers have increased greatly with the advent of globalization.

To investigate the historical development of KETG and the current nature of their TD practices, I utilized the following data collection methods: (a) observations of the TD group at the meetings and workshops they held, (b) in-depth interviews with teacher participants about their dispositions and beliefs about teacher development and KETG, and (c) the gathering of documents and published materials related to KETG. My first observation of a KETG steering committee weekly meeting occurred in mid-May 2000.[8] My observations also extended to TD sessions and informal get-togethers among teachers throughout the thirteen weeks from May to August 2000.[9] I took written field notes, but decided not to tape-record the weekly meetings because of my concern that the teachers would feel inhibited in front of audio-taping equipment. I made every effort to observe their meetings in a natural, unobtrusive, and non-threatening manner (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). However, I sometimes had the chance to contribute to group discussions based upon my own experiences teaching and studying in my graduate program.

In addition to my observations, I interviewed five teacher participants (three males and two females) in the steering committee regarding their dispositions and beliefs about KETG to explore the norms and behaviors that had contributed to the formation and maintenance of professional relationships in their group.[10] More informal gatherings, such as dinners with the committee teachers after the meetings, enabled me to explore deeper layers of information comfortably. These interviews were often like "a

[8] Prior to my first participant observation, I e-mailed and telephoned some lead teachers in the committee to ask their permission to conduct research and to solicit their cooperation. With the oral consent of the teachers, I started observing the steering committee weekly meetings.

[9] The data for this article were originally collected for my MA scholarly paper (Cho, 2001). I conducted a follow-up study during 2002-2003 for this article. In terms of my role as a researcher, my own status as an insider gave me a head start in understanding the *emic* contextual features and provided an easier point of entry for researching the world of Korean secondary school EFL teachers. Not only was my status greatly beneficial to getting site entrée and to making contacts, but also it helped me establish and maintain good rapport with the teacher participants. I believe that this relationship encouraged intimacy and perhaps more "in-depth" data compared to what a researcher who has little knowledge and insight into the Korean EFL context would have gotten.

[10] I audiotaped all the interviews with the oral consent of the interviewees. The audiotaped interviews were transcribed in full. All interviews were conducted in Korean and translated into English.

conversation between friends" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 94). Most teachers in the steering committee expressed strong interest in my background, both academic and career, and my graduate studies at an American university. They wanted to know about the possibilities for financial aid for studying aboard and for leaves from the district.[11] I provided as much information as I could, and at the same time, realized how highly motivated the teachers were for further personal and professional development. I also interviewed five English teachers who had participated in KETG summer workshops and three teachers who did not attend the workshops, but subscribed to KETG publications.

Data collection oriented toward a more macro-perspective mainly involved gathering of documents including planning strategies, brochures, newsletters, survey questionnaires, and meeting agendas. The documents were related to the organization and activities of KETG; efforts to promote collegiality and a sense of community among the members; and plans for revamping the process by which decisions were made. As suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1998) and many other qualitative researchers, data analysis began immediately after my first observation of a KETG weekly committee meeting in May 2000. The first stage of data analysis involved careful coding (theme) of all interview data and my field notes. With a strategy of analytic induction (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Miles & Huberman, 1994), I repeatedly read through the transcripts of the interview data, my field notes, and KETG related documents during and after the data collection. I then created a visual representation that highlighted patterns or relationships among the codes. This conceptual map enabled me to identify recurrent, salient themes with regard to promises and problems of the grassroots TD group.

In the following section, I examine notions of critical teacher development in the current literature and as exemplified in the KETG model. I then specifically discuss the promises and challenges of KETG as a grassroots TD group that aims at critical teacher development in the South Korean context. To conclude, I explore the potential for a similar grassroots TD group for EFL teachers in the periphery.

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[11] I was fully funded by a U.S. federal research institution in Hawaii for my graduate studies. I was also on a leave of absence for my studies from the district administration. The provision of this kind of information and my assistance with their workshop preparation may be counted as 'exchange of services or reciprocity' (Davis, 1995, p. 443) in the ethnographic literature.

DEFINING CRITICAL TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

The term 'teacher development' has different notions in different contexts and operates from a variety of beliefs (Guskey & Huberman, 1994; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992; Head & Taylor, 1997; Kremer-Hayon, Vonk, & Fessler, 1993; Underhill, 1992). Yet, one proposition that is widely held by researchers in the TD literature is that teachers should grow throughout their lifetime, both personally and professionally. For example, Guskey (2000) defines professional development as "processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills and attitudes of educators so that they might, in turn, improve the learning of students" (p. 16). However, it should be noted that these processes and activities are influenced not only by teachers' personal characteristics, beliefs, values, and motivations, but also by social, cultural, political, and institutional factors (Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Guesky & Huberman, 1994). Just as education is political (Friere, 1970), teacher development is also inextricably linked with the sociopolitical context in which teachers are situated.

TD can take place in many different forms. It can be initiated and enhanced by a variety of procedures, such as keeping teaching journals (Bailey, Curtis, & Nunan, 1998; Brock, Yu, & Wong, 1992); conducting action research (Crookes, 1993); videotaping one's own class (Wallace, 1991); developing teacher portfolios (Johnson, 1996; Wolfe-Quintero & Brown, 1998); and observing peers (Cosh, 1999; Silliman & Wilkinson, 1991). These methods can provide teachers with support and means for inquiry and reflection. For example, Farrell (1999) describes a small group of EFL teachers in South Korea who decided to get together and enhance their teaching practice through peer observation and reflection. Such teachers consider TD as a process of continually unfolding their beliefs through critical reflection (Gebhard, 1998).

Teacher development groups represent one type of professional development strategy that entails a sustained process that aims to bring about change in teaching practice. Head and Taylor (1997) define a TD group as "any form of co-operative and ongoing arrangement between two or more teachers to work together on their own personal and professional development" (p. 91). Even though the idea of development as embodied in

support groups has been prevalent in fields such as social work and therapy for a long time, the recent transfer of the notion from other fields to TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) still merits attention. The TD group being studied here addresses a significant, but neglected, area of teacher development in the periphery. It shows the potential not only to improve the quality of localized EFL teaching practices, but also to collectively problematize the hegemonic power manifested in Western-based approaches (see Canagarajah, 1993) to teaching English as well as the marginalized status of EFL teachers in the educational policy making process in their home country. In the following description of the KETG study, I begin with a discussion of the possibilities of the grassroots teacher development group. I then describe the challenges of KETG which in turn result in creating barriers to critical participation in teacher development. Finally, I explore the potential for EFL teacher development groups in similar contexts.

REALIZING CRITICAL TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

Promoting Collegiality

The notion of collegiality in education implies a rejection of direct prescriptive controls (Lawn & Ozga, 1986) in favor of a process that is more dependent on engineering broad forms of consensus (Smyth, 1994).[12] Teachers, who are often alienated (Auerbach, 1991; Crookes, 1993), value collegial approaches to their work and frequently use them as forms of covert resistance to the prescriptions of national and local educational authorities (see Nias, Southwork, & Yeomans, 1989). Building collaborative relationships with colleagues can lead teachers to feel a greater sense of power to change their classroom (see for example, McLaghlin & Talbert, 1993). As Lieberman (2000) states, participation in a TD group that supports teachers' professional identity can bring "great power and energy" to teachers (p. 223).

Similarly, KETG creates a climate of collegiality among Korean EFL teachers. In the interviews with the teacher participants in the workshop, there was ample evidence of what Josselson (1995, cited in Lima, 1998) calls "pleasure of connection", the pleasure of

[12] Some educational researchers have attempted to measure teacher collegiality through quantitative methods (see e.g., Lima, 1998, McLaughlin, 1993; Siskin, 1994).

"feeling not alone even if we are not in current or potential need" (p. 59). When asked whether she had a chance to participate in the KETG workshop,[13] Ji-hyun Lee,[14] in her late-forties, a veteran of 17 years, said:

> No. [laughs] I'm surprised at the atmosphere here. Every teacher looks so enthusiastic for learning and … they are so concerned about the problems in the classroom. This is my first time that I've ever had to talk with other teachers about my professional concerns. I feel I'm not alone. I'm so glad to come here not only because I can refresh my teaching skills but also feel kind of "a sense of camaraderie." (I, August 1, 2000) [15]

By offering a space for teachers to feel the sense of camaraderie, KETG provides an environment of unity and rapport for teachers who are isolated in their own classrooms. For some, it was the beginning of real discussion for the first time of important pedagogical concerns in the classroom. For others, it was one aspect of an ongoing process in which they explored the challenges and problems beyond their school. Shared agenda for the workshop appeared to promote collegiality and the sharing of ideas with one another:

> The learning at the workshop sessions may not be as important as the stimulation to think, the opportunities to be away from the usual routines and the pressure from home and school, and the chance to gain new perspectives with new people. It seems like the action orientation of their discussion is creating a special spirit of collegiality. Many teachers seem to realize how valuable is the opportunity to get together and discuss what they want to share with other teachers (FN, August, 8, 2000).

Teachers who participated in the workshop recognized that teachers need one another in order to stay informed and remain on the cutting edge of knowledge and practice (Watson & Stevenson, 1989). That is, KETG offers an opportunity for teachers to learn within social settings that break isolation, grant support, and generate conversations and networks. This has been identified as a major reason for the effectiveness of groups in

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[13] KETG holds local workshops and national forums on a variety of EFL-related topics, including useful classroom techniques, classroom management, and other EFL language policy issues. For example, during 2000 summer workshops on 'Conducting Effective Group Work in the EFL Classroom,' teacher participants reflected on their teaching practice related to the given topic. About 500 secondary English teachers from all over the country, from rural areas to big cities, gathered to participate in the workshops. I observed that, even after a demanding, all-day long workshop (13 hours per day), more than 100 teacher participants stayed up all night discussing their pedagogical concerns, while having snacks and drinks, in their rooms, lounges, halls, and outside the building.

[14] To preserve the teachers' anonymity, their identities were kept confidential by assigning pseudonyms.

[15] Data notations are as follows: I, interview; FN, field note; ER, email response.

initiating change for growth and maintaining it. In their study of TD groups for beginning teachers, Rogers and Babinski (2002) found that a sense of connection, mutual support, and encouragement among peers greatly affected the success of the TD groups. In such environments, novice teachers could feel comfortable with one another and actively engage in collaborative, productive conversation that centered around problems they face in their classrooms. As indicated in many empirical studies on teacher collaboration in relatively small school-based teacher groups (see e.g., Birchak et al., 1998; Boggs, 1996), a healthy community encourages individual involvement in the pursuit of shared purpose. In other words, positive collegial relationships can play a significant role in fostering teachers' professional growth (Little, 1982). Avoiding a judgmental, acrimonious relationship among teacher participants and building a strong network of moral support within a group are the keys to the success of TD groups (e.g., Birchak et al., 1998; Ceese, Norwich, & Daniels, 2000; Farrell, 1999).

Correspondingly, my observations of the KETG meetings and my interviews with the steering committee members revealed that strong personal bonds among the KETG core teachers are crucial factors in keeping them together and moving forward despite all the challenges faced by the teachers. Sustained improvement of KETG has been achieved only with the remarkable investment of energy and commitment of core teachers within KETG. Given that only about 40 teachers among the 2,000 teachers with membership were actively involved in the steering committee and study groups within KETG, as of February 2001 (ER, March 2, 2001), the dedication of those teachers deserves recognition for their contributions to the maintenance and development of KETG. Two noticeable phenomena within the group dynamics were the close relationships among core teachers and the influence of a charismatic head teacher. Tae-hwan Kim, in his mid-forties, one of the eight teachers who founded KETG said:

> Most of us have already known one another very well since our college days. We had lots of discussions about a variety of social educational issues as well as personal issues. That's the way we started this group. (I, June 27)

Most teacher participants were both close friends and mutual work collaborators. They shared their concerns about personal as well as professional issues, and most of them had been long-time close friends since their college years. In fact, the personal ties were

important springboards for the establishment of KETG. Hae-young, too, highly valued that the spirit of congregation, collaboration, and caring—often called *Jeong* in Korean—as a crucial factor in the maintenance of KETG:

> In spite of all the difficulties we have had, we've made it because of our 'teamwork' in the committee. Without psychological support from one another, we would have dissolved this group a long time ago (I, June 21, 2000).

Tae-hwan agreed with Hae-young on the value of close relationships among members:

> We are very good friends. We meet at least once a week, formally or informally and share our concerns, feelings, opinions, and whatever. We are always there for members' birthdays, parties, ceremonies, and so on. Trust and respect among us is highly valued. I like the teachers and respect them a great deal. They are the ones who went through the good times and the bad times with me. I think this [close relationship] has led us to be where we are now. (I, June 27, 2000)

By providing a "safe space" (Lieberman & Miller, 1984) for engaging in collaborative conversation about their teaching and their lives as teachers (Rogers & Babinski, 2002), KETG helped teachers to voice their concerns and share their joys and frustrations. In KETG, working cooperatively as peers, sensing commonality, and participating voluntarily contributes to a social conviviality that has some parallels in desirable models of TD.

In addition to the close relationships among core teachers, the role of leadership in developing and sustaining KETG appears to be significant. Senge (1990) states that many of the problems organization face can be traced to leadership or the lack thereof. In the case of KETG, the individual who played a central role in this non-hierarchical organization was Jin-sang Choo. A middle school teacher from Seoul in his mid-forties, Mr. Choo is the individual whose remarkable leadership skills are universally recognized and respected by KETG core members. He has been working on the steering committee for almost ten years from the beginning of his teaching career. He is deeply involved in every aspect of KETG activities, including publications, website-building, seminars, and workshops. The following excerpts from interviews with the core teachers on the KETG steering committee reveal the extent of his commitment and contribution to KETG:

> Without him, this group would have died years ago. I really admire his incredible dedication to the group. He is extremely hardworking and insightful in Korean educational practice.

> Whenever I feel stressed out, I look at him and think " How can he do this for so long?" (laughs) (I, June 26, 2000)

> His ability is outstanding, and high energy is infectious. He motivates other teachers. He is obviously a role model for us as well as a pioneer in the field of Korean teachers' professional movement. Our group owes him a ton. Well, I'd even think if we had another Mr. Choo in our group, we would accomplish a lot more things than now. He is like…more than an 'ordinary' teacher, you know. What I mean is that he sees things more logically and holistically than the rest of us. He is passionate, persistent, creative, and experienced. It's very rare to find that a teacher with all those characteristics combined. (I, July 29, 2000)

According to the teachers I interviewed, Mr. Choo plays a role as a "slightly more expert" teacher in KETG, providing his expertise and experience for other teachers in their constructive efforts in the TD group. Revisiting Vygotsky's (1978) notion of the Zone of Proximal Development, Hertzog (2000) asserts that TD groups should consider the value of having slightly more expert teachers (as opposed to "expert" mentor teachers).

When asked what made him eagerly participate in KETG, Mr. Choo said in a somewhat modest manner:

> Well… that's just because I've valued collaboration a great deal since I was in college. I believe discussing critical issues together with my colleagues have enabled me to grow personally and professionally. Without my involvement in KETG, I could not have been where I'm now. I've found myself become aware of the importance of professional development through my participation in this group. I see the difference I've made on my students' faces in my classroom, which makes me feel so rewarded. In a way, I feel a sense of personal empowerment and entitlement by doing this work. (I, August 3, 2000)

He embraces the value of collaboration enthusiastically because of its potential to contribute to TD. Through his involvement in KETG, he affirms himself a "language activist" (Crookes, 1997), acknowledges his own professional growth over time, and recognizes the mutual benefit between KETG and his professionalism. He also speaks convincingly of the "we can do anything" mindset of the KETG leadership, the value of teacher collaboration, the sense of reward that goes with overcoming immense odds, and the teamwork of the teachers working in KETG. Furthermore, he stresses the importance of developing local knowledge that is appropriate for the Korean EFL student population,

resisting the blind adoptability of communicative language teaching (CLT) that is uncritically enforced by the educational policy in South Korea (see Li, 1998 for the critique of CLT in the Korean context). In short, his leadership and commitment to the shared visions and goals of the TD group as an advocate for social change appears to be one of the distinctive features of KETG.

Getting EFL Teachers' Voices Heard: Empowerment

It is extremely difficult for the individual reflective teacher to make school change without a critical mass of colleagues who strive to share goals and visions. To this end, KETG provides an infrastructure for supporting reflective teachers who would want to explore issues in the classroom and beyond, critically and collaboratively, with colleagues. One of the firm beliefs that KETG core teachers have in common is that the decisions that lie at the heart of teaching English should shift to teachers who are marginalized: " Teachers don't have power because they don't have access to those who wield it," said Chan-jun Kim, a participant to a KETG subgroup. "We believe, well…at least I believe that what we're doing is making a difference by giving voice to teachers" (I, August 10, 2000). KETG teachers undertake their activities voluntarily, so there *is* a sense of ownership and commitment. More importantly, the strength of KETG lies in its representing Korean EFL classroom teachers' needs and opinions rather than imposing a top-down educational policy mostly derived from the Western approaches to TESOL. For example, in order to express their objection to the top-down national educational policy of conducting English classes through English only, some teacher participants in the workshops suggested signing a petition form to protest against the policy:

> This is a very good chance to show our collective power to the government. They [the educational authorities] think we are a puppet or something that does whatever they tell us to do. We don't merely deliver the curriculum. They seem to ignore the fact that it is what teachers think, what they believe, and what they do, at the level of the classroom that ultimately shapes the kind of learning that our kids get. Look at the policy that all classes must be taught in English only! They don't consider the current situation in secondary classrooms. How can we change our practice overnight? How can we become bilingual teachers who have no problem speaking English in such a short time period without attending any appropriate language improvement programs? I believe that that kind of language policy

> stems from the blind adoptability of Western approaches to teaching English. We should show them how we feel about the policy in a more powerful, collective way than we do now. (I, August 8, 2000)

Jang-won Choi, in his mid-forties, underscores the significance of the collective power of teachers who can make a change at the classroom level, yet have been denied access to policy-making processes. He affirms the role of teachers as active agents, not merely as puppets, in education reform and criticizes the top-down approaches to EFL policy-making in South Korea. His argument summarizes poignantly the lack of teacher voice in the process of TD as well as language policy that assumes the marginalized status of classroom teachers. As such, KETG provides an important, ongoing structure for gaining autonomy and a major means for building communities of teachers and providing avenues for empowerment[16] (cf. Crammer, 1996).

In addition, the resource of decision-making within KETG is obviously one of the factors that cause KETG activities to be seen as dissimilar from traditional in-service programs. KETG is not regimented in a top-down bureaucratic manner. It is a place where classroom teachers explore ways in which they can enhance their practices—ways that come from their own inquiries and interests, rather than from mandates, standards, and prescriptive approaches to teacher training. Teachers themselves make decisions about how to plan, organize, and carry out the plans in KETG.

All the teachers I interviewed expressed dissatisfaction, frustration, and even anger toward in-service programs led by the Ministry of Education, arguing that KETG should put considerable resources into creating a systematic curriculum for classroom teachers on its own. Kyung-min Hah, a middle school English teacher from Busan, spoke about her overriding sense of dissatisfaction toward the government-led in-service programs:

> I am sick of the current mandatory in-service programs led by the government. The usual pattern of most teachers has been to get through the staff development, then go back to their classrooms, close the door, and teach very much as they had been before. That is because the government-led in-service programs have not reflected on what the teachers wanted to get from it. They [educational administrators] have never shared the evaluation results with us

[16] Although the notion of *empowerment* has become ubiquitous among critical researchers and educators, used as some kind of panacea for all the educational problems (Lankshear, 1995), I use the term because it is a critical concept in elucidating the nature of KETG. It was one of the most recurrent themes throughout the interview data.

> that the instructors, who are mostly native speakers and university professors, have done at the end of the course. There is no teachers' voice in there! (I, August 1, 2000)

Ms. Hah's comment suggests the role of KETG as an avenue for gaining autonomy and a major means for developing professionalism deriving from critical perspectives. Hye-young Kang, one of the steering committee teachers, echoes the group's pivotal role in empowering teachers:

> I think KETG plays a considerable role in getting practitioners involved in the decision-making process for educational policy, curricular, and procedures. One of its primary purposes is to get classroom teachers' voice heard who have continually been silenced, and left in the dark about educational decisions. KETG tries to raise awareness regarding political issues so that we can get our voice heard. (I, August 2, 2000)

The sociopolitical role of KETG is summed up well by Hye-young. The TD group provides a space in which to allow teachers to participate in the decision-making process for their own professional development. Hye-young's comment also deserves attention in that she asserts the significance of sociopolitical issues beyond immediate pedagogical concerns and interests shared by most teachers. She implies that classroom teachers should participate in the political decision-making procedures, rather than merely making "the paralyzing focus on methodology" (Ortega, 1999, p. 259) and that KETG is playing the role of meeting the political and educational goals of Korean EFL learners. As an example of KEGT's sociopolitical action, the president of the group actively voiced KETG's opposition to the English-only policy in the classroom and the English-as-official-language-policy (see Yoo, this volume, for detailed discussion of the proposed EOL policy in South Korea) through participating in various panel discussions and interviews with mass media.

For more sustained participation in the language policy and the development of the knowledge base for Korean EFL teaching, KETG also created the Research Center for Korean English Teaching in which teachers as researchers collaboratively discuss educational issues in a critical manner. The Research Center members resist the "evangelical zeal with which the pedagogical methods are propagated and presented to" (Kachru, 1990, p. 15) the periphery country and strive for developing appropriate and effective teaching methods for the Korean EFL population and thus participating in the educational policy making process as informed, transformative intellectuals. Taken

together, KETG teachers appear to embrace a notion of empowerment by participating in social, political practices of policy making.

Gradual Acknowledgement by the Ministry of Education

There is some evidence that structural collaboration between KETG and the educational government forms a significant infrastructure of language policies to improve long-term professional development needs of Korean EFL teachers. Specifically, acknowledgement and support by the Ministry of Education (MOE) could facilitate an atmosphere in which teachers were more willing to participate in KETG activities. For instance, according to workshop organizers, more teachers participated in the workshops in the year 2000 than in the last few years because the Ministry of Education decided to give in-service credits to the participants. The district credit given to teachers could be recognized as acknowledgement by the MOE administrators of teachers' commitment to professional growth. Also, KETG entered a competition for practitioners sponsored by the MOE and received a grant for materials development from the MOE in March 2000. This unprecedented financial support from the MOE seems to indicate a gradual positive change of the administrative stance toward the grassroots TD group. Mr. Choo commented:

> Their [administrative authorities] acknowledgement of our activities is encouraging. They started offering more support for teacher research than in the past. KETG is now considered as an influential force for English teachers' professional development. (I, May 30, 2000)

Another significant instance of the government recognition is the fact that the textbook written by KETG core teachers in 2002 was accepted by the MOE and then selected by the largest number of middle schools in the nation. It appears beneficial to the growth of KETG that the educational authorities started recognizing the TD group as a legitimate professional development agency and 'official' author of language materials.[17] Moreover, it is important to acknowledge the newly evolving relationship between the government and the nationwide TD group that instantiates the ways in which teachers can collectively voice their concerns involving educational policy issues in spite of the inherent power differentials. The recognition and support from the MOE is due, in part,

[17] It was the first time in South Korea that secondary classroom teachers wrote an English textbook as primary authors.

to the perceived needs of improving EFL teaching and learning in the nation. This partnership between the administration and the bottom-up TD group could possibly recast conceptions of how Korean EFL teachers teach and develop their professionalism.[18]

CHALLENGES OF THE TD GROUP

Despite the promising aspects of KETG discussed above, two factors appear to inhibit the TD group from moving to a more productive and critical level of work: a lack of time for involvement by teachers and the passive roles of most members. These two limitations seem to weaken efforts to solve existing problems in practice, and perhaps they also create barriers to critical participation in TD in the long run.

Lack of Time

Research on TD has often identified time as an important contextual variable in professional development (e.g., Holly, 1989; Holly & Holly, 1983; Maeroff, 1988). In her action research on teacher study groups in an American suburban elementary school, Boggs (1996) found that the lack of meeting time was a common constraint identified by the teachers in the study groups. Not surprisingly, the teachers in my study consistently referred to the problem of not having adequate time to perform their roles as active participants. This lack of time created stress and conflict for some teachers as they struggled to fulfill their dual responsibilities of being classroom teachers and teacher researchers in the steering committee:

> I found it (KETG work as a committee member) exhausting. I do like the work I'm doing here, but I feel I am neglecting my own classroom, to some extent. I have to admit that it is very difficult to do a good job both working in KETG and focusing on teaching my own class. (I, June 20, 2000)

Two participants in the summer workshop echoed other teachers' frustration with the time constraints:

[18] However, the depth of the chasm that separated teachers from administrators was often mentioned in the interviews. The teachers still felt that their efforts to have an impact on teaching practice were stifled by unsupportive administration. They also mentioned that support from the MOE and district administration should not only be financial support for teachers but also psychological support, trust, respect, and appreciation. A receptive climate that supports and appreciates teachers' efforts will not be created without positive change in administration's view of teachers and the teachers' professional development.

> There is no time to interact professionally with my colleagues at school. There is just some bitching about the administrators and everyone talking about how frustrated they are with their work. When school is over, I'm so exhausted and I don't want to talk to anyone. And I'm sure I'm not the only one who feels that way. (I, July 31, 2000)

> The worst thing is that there just isn't enough time. I have 24 class hours to teach per week, and have tons of work to do as a homeroom teacher of 43 middle school boys. On top of that, I take several different administrative responsibilities. As you can imagine, I'm already stressed out with what I've got to do now! You know what I mean. (I, August 1, 2000)

Most teachers I interviewed agreed that they were pressed for time for professional development. Many of the teachers were already overcommitted with faculty meetings, extracurricular activities, meetings with students and parents, and non-teaching, administrative responsibilities. The overwhelming workload for teachers undeniably hinders their productive efforts to reflect on practice and integrate new practices into their teaching repertoire. In fact, time is not only an issue in TD, but also in school reform (Acheson & Gall, 2003). Fullan and Miles (1992) state that every analysis of the problems of change efforts that researchers have seen in the past has concluded that time is the salient issue. In short, time is probably one of the biggest barriers to any efforts for teachers' critical reflection and professional growth.

Lack of Teachers' Critical Participation

Since language teaching cannot be understood apart from the sociopolitical environments in which it takes place (Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Pennycook, 1994), EFL teachers should explore social, cultural and political issues related to teaching and learning beyond mere interest in their day-to-day classroom practices. However, like critical voices in language education have claimed for the past few decades (e.g., Freeman & Johnson, 1998; McKay & Wong, 1988; Tedick & Walker, 1994), a myopic focus on methodology may often divert attention away from examining the sociopolitical dimensions of language education (Ortega, 1999).

As mentioned previously, a majority of teachers with KETG membership are not critical in terms of sociopolitical engagement. Teachers who merely attend a workshop are still relatively passive recipients of the outcomes produced by the lead KETG

members. As Mr. Choo noted, teachers then would return to their classrooms and implement what they had 'learned' with varying degrees of success:

> Usually teachers walk away with a set of classroom activities, but little discussion of why they would want to do that activity or sense of how to develop their own classroom engagements. Without active involvement in exploring theoretical considerations, it would be difficult for teachers to foster true change in their practice. (I, June 30, 2000)

Other core teachers similarly echoed Mr. Choo's concern about the lack of the "teacher as researcher" approach to EFL practices. An unbalanced emphasis on training activities could lead to formulaic teaching, the kind that applies the same teaching strategies, activities, and solutions in every situation (Freeman, 1989). This problematic phenomenon was also observed in KETG published materials. Although the publications and printed materials have increasingly become more attractive to teachers, at times, in an attempt to respond to teachers' immediate needs, they tend to provide answers, tips, and recipes for day-to-day classroom practices. Hye-young expressed her concern:

> It seems that most teachers with membership settle for being 'uncritical consumers' of the products made by a small number of the lead teachers. They tend to receive passively from KETG whatever it produces. (I, June 13, 2000)

There seems to be a tendency to take on the most telling characteristic of traditional inservice teacher training—didactic teaching. To avoid the top-down approach within KETG, the critical consumption of ELT materials remains a definitely necessary task for the majority of KETG teachers. Furthermore, it is necessary to examine the impact of KETG on the individual teacher's perspective because the majority of Korean EFL teachers seem less receptive to critical perspectives than KETG core teachers in terms of unraveling the social inequalities and the status of English as the privileged language.

Another great challenge concerning teachers' passive roles lies in encouraging substantive group interaction and sustaining the group over time to foster significant changes in teaching practice. Soon-ha Shim on the steering committee expressed her frustration about forming a new teacher study group:

> It is extremely difficult to create a new teacher group and sustain it. We make every effort to encourage the teachers to form a study group on their own when we offer workshops by emphasizing the value and importance of teacher collaborative work. But the results are not too satisfactory. I think it's not just a matter of time constraints that almost all teachers are

> facing. It's a lack of critical awareness and commitment to professional development. Not all teachers feel it is necessary to get together and explore issues that should deserve being studied by teachers. Even given the time for that [professional development], some teachers are reluctant to participate actively in KETG. (I, June 29, 2000)

Soon-ha goes on to say that many Korean EFL teachers would turn to an uncritical acceptance of the usual, practical techniques and activities that are readily applicable to teaching, rather than engaging themselves in self-reflective, yet more time-consuming endeavors, such as critical action research (Kincheloe, 1995). The lack of critical examination of their responsibility in producing local knowledge may stem from not only structured constraints but also the entrenched belief that EFL professional culture is apolitical in nature (Pennycook, 2001). In fact, English teachers in South Korea are often viewed as individualistic, detached, and reluctant to collaboration, compared to other subject matter teachers. This perception regarding English teachers appears to come from within KETG as well as from outside forces. Five of my interviewees mentioned this characteristic as one possible constraint on creating and maintaining TD groups among Korean EFL teachers. Thus, it will remain a challenge to promote critical discussion among EFL teachers regarding such issues as the hegemonic power of English and the sociopolitical role of English teachers in the Korean society.

EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL FOR EFL TEACHER DEVELOPMENT GROUPS

The aforementioned descriptions of the promises and problems of KETG may provide several long-term implications for a similar nationwide EFL TD group. Specifically, how would a nationwide EFL TD group facilitate teachers' sustained professional development? What factors should be taken into consideration in order to empower teachers and enable them to become majority stakeholders in efforts to push EFL education ahead? Although responses to these questions are dynamic and partial in that they represent the experiences of individual participants and a certain TD group at particular points in time, the themes discussed in the study illustrate potential suggestions for a similar nationwide TD organization in a similar socio-cultural context.

Recognizing Development as a Self-Directed Move

The findings of this study support the idea that it is crucial to involve teachers actively in their own professional development, in contrast to training or retraining, which suggest a top-down approach. KETG fosters change as an active creator of teacher development. It gives teachers control over the selection of professional activities and topics on their own. Indeed, as many teachers in this study repeatedly mentioned, KETG functions as an alternative agent for providing continuing teacher development with *a sense of ownership*. In the Korean EFL context, where there is little coherent infrastructure for teacher development, and thus it is not the responsibility of any identifiable groups or agency, this teacher-initiated and teacher-directed group seems to play a significant role in involving teachers in the process of professional development. I found that the teacher participants' expectations of KETG were extremely high and that they seemed to consider KETG as the *only* resource for their professional development. This can lead teachers to engage themselves in self-directed professional activities that foster empowerment of teachers. For the success of TD groups, teachers must see themselves as more than mere recipients of services, more than clients upon whom the administration bestows largesse. In other words, teachers should be more prone than ever to seek information and ideas that will help them figure out for themselves how to deal with their own problems. They should be less compliant and tractable receivers of information and more involved stakeholders and partakers in the TD process. Otherwise, teachers will be passive users rather than active creators (Common, 1983).

Building Community and Ongoing Relationships

A successful TD group makes every effort to facilitate an atmosphere in which teachers are willing to build community and relationships.[19] "A sense of belonging (to a team)" (Day, Whitaker, & Johnston, 1987) can affect teachers' underlying assumptions about their involvement in development initiatives (Nicholls, 1997). In order to sustain teacher-driven professional development, the teacher network should develop supportive norms, providing the extra encouragement that teachers need to return to their schools with renewed energy, vision, and commitment. Accordingly, the nature of the community-building activities and the growth of relationships within the group are crucial elements in cementing the commitment of the participants. This is crucial to avoid short-term, discrete, limited prepackaged teacher training as KETG workshops offer more chances for participants to share their knowledge and ideas, and to reflect on what they have learned from one another in workshops, online, and in small study groups.

Needless to say, a large TD group, like KETG, would need to have small teacher study groups to facilitate relationship-building efforts. Activities should be compelling enough to keep people coming back; they are not confined to professional activities to improve knowledge and skills. Explicit community-building activities (e.g., social gatherings, organized parties, celebrations, and special occasions), whose expressed goals are to have members be more social, could result in an ethos of individual concern and sympathy for colleagues. Those kinds of activities, along with subtle, circumstantial, and covert community-building experiences, can build a supportive atmosphere in which teachers feel secure enough to be honest with themselves and with others.[20] This facilitative atmosphere thus can help teachers, as non-hierarchical and participatory individuals, in order to take the risks and make the efforts required in trying to extend their awareness of professional development (Underhill, 1992).

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[19] The counter position to this argument is to be found in Lima's (1998) study of teachers' collegiality in Portuguese secondary schools. In his study, Lima found that close friendship was an obstacle to—as well as a beneficial factor for—the adequate performance accomplishment of work-related goals. See also Bridge & Baxter, 1992, for nice illustrations of the inherent duality of personal relationships among teachers in schools.

[20] On the contrary, the findings of some empirical studies indicate great difficulty getting to the team-building/support group stage since the emphasis was so much on 'warm' feedback that participants were never pushed very hard (see e.g., Dunne & Honts, 1998).

Collaborating with the Government

Perhaps one of the most interesting, yet controversial issues addressed in this study may be that the involvement of the Ministry of Education can *be* the primary component for the growth of a nationwide TD group. This renders a very different perspective on TD groups from the findings of previous studies on North American local school-based teacher groups (e.g., Birchak et al., 1998, see also Moore, 1996; Siegal, 1997, for the drawbacks of the government involvement in other contexts) that typically indicates that it would be better to steer clear of administrative involvement to better communicate within the group and not to be co-opted by the government. However, in the context where the hierarchical structure of the educational system inevitably exists and where a central educational policy is a crucial factor for change, like South Korea, the success of a nationwide TD group lies in true partnership with the Ministry of Education and district administration. Although KETG may be able to provide the initiatives to reflect on practice and possibly some on-going consolatory support, most of the support offered to individual teachers has to come from within the administration. In other words, a system of rewards and incentives from the MOE is necessary in order to support sustained professional development for teachers.

The Ministry of Education and district administration must have a deep understanding of the longer-term processes of change and adopt TD as one of the most important priorities. This priority should be reflected in all decisions, including allocation of financial resources and time. Undeniably, the administration's role is paramount in supporting and enhancing the experience, as well as in continually encouraging the teachers to pursue their developmental goals. It is important to recognize that the joint efforts of the Ministry of Education, district administration, and teacher development groups, like KETG, toward the improvement of EFL teaching practices in such a country with a centralized educational system will enhance the opportunities for teachers to maximize ongoing professional development.

CONCLUSIONS

> …[T] he closer one is to the source of the problem, the greater is one's ability of influence it; and the problem-solving ability of complex systems depends not on hierarchical control but on maximizing discretion at the point where the problem is most immediate (Elmore, 1980, pp. 604-605).

Elmore notes the significance of the teacher's role in education given that the critical role of the teacher in the implementation of educational changes is often overlooked (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). When national education systems attempt educational change, it is natural for them to try to ameliorate the new situation by providing knowledge and skills, particularly in the form of top-down in-service training. Traditional top-down approaches, however, often fall short of meeting the professional needs of teachers (Freeman, 1989) as complex educational challenges cannot be solved by a mere transmission of information from educational authorities (Clair, 1998). Thus, we must explore new approaches to teachers' professional development to conceptualize the knowledge base of language teacher development (Freeman & Johnson, 1998). Yet, as Duff and Uchida (1997) observe, many social, cultural, and political dimensions of teachers' practices remain unexplored. As we better understand how and under what circumstances such approaches actually improve teaching practices and promote critical discussions among teachers, we will be able to make more effective models for doing so.

The present study highlights the sociopolitical basis for the foregrounding and transforming of aspects of teacher development in South Korea. It provides insights about how a nationwide EFL teacher development group takes shape, develops, and draws the issues that crop up in organizing and maintaining it in spite of constraints faced by EFL teachers. As demonstrated by the teacher groups conducted by Hollingsworth (1992) and Rogers and Babinski (2002), TD groups, like KETG, provide room for collegiality and empower teachers by getting their voices heard in the educational policy-making procedure.

KETG members still have a great deal to learn about the conditions in which internal and external interventions can take root and thrive. They are still in the process of formulating answers to the critical questions that were presented at the outset of this paper. Nevertheless, it appears to be an example of new professional development from

the Expanding Circle, depending as it does on teachers behaving as managers of their own learning and as social agents for change in the national context. Challenges and limitations may exist, but KETG teachers are developing a community of hope, commitment, and connection that ultimately aims at raising "social construction of professional consciousness" (Kincheloe, 1995, p. 74). Most importantly, KEGT suggests a possibility of transforming EFL teaching practices in legitimizing teacher participation in social action thereby resisting the marginalized status of EFL teachers. As one teacher member of the steering committee summarized, "I definitely see a teacher development group idea fulfilling the vision and the goals of EFL teaching in Korea. Although we still have a long way to go, I don't think we will ever stop."

DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to my friend Ok Kyoon whose life was too short for the world to recognize his brilliant and critical mind. He was a caring, intelligent, humorous, and humble man. He was my beloved friend and colleague who passionately discussed issues regarding Korean EFL education and critical pedagogy. Our talks never lasted long enough and I am proud to say he was my friend. I will greatly miss him.

Hye-sun

이 글을 제 친구 옥균씨에게 바칩니다. 너무나도 짧은 삶을 산 그였기에 세상이 미처 그분의 훌륭하고 날카로운 비평 능력을 알아주지 못한것이 너무나도 아쉽습니다. 옥균씨는 자상하고, 영민하며, 유머스럽고, 겸손한 분이었습니다. 제 존경하는 친구이자 동료로써, 한국 영어교육과 critical pedagogy 에 대해 열정적으로 토론했었던 옥균씨. 우리 대화는 항상 아쉬움이 남았었는데...그 분이 제 친구였다는 사실이 자랑스럽습니다. 정말 많이 보고 싶을 거에요.

혜선 드림

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